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Abstract

Within performed ritual, Hmong Americans use dress as a medium to express a vision of cultural life responsive to both their cultural past and their new American context. This article is a part of a larger research project focused on the role of dress in the formulation of Hmong American cultural life. This paper focuses on how dress is used within two different New Year performances to make sense of the position of the Hmong in America. Public and private Hmong American New Year rituals are arenas wherein dress is used to express the struggle for reconciliation between the older and younger generations, the old and new ways, and Hmong and American cultures. Separate and differently focused New Year celebrations formally acknowledge the valued roles of Hmong elders as links to the Hmong past and Hmong youth as links to an American future. Both celebrations incorporate a recognition of the core problem of reconciling Hmong and American cultures. Both use dress to give voice to the young and the old as they struggle for cultural definition in the United States.

Key words: ritual, material culture, Hmong, refugees

Hmong Americans use dress[1] as a medium to express a vision of cultural life responsive to both their cultural past and their new American context. We investigated and documented this process. Research focused upon dress used or worn during private and public celebrations of New Year. The theoretical underpinnings of the analysis rest on Victor Turner's work on tradition and performed ritual. Turner (1988) argued that meaning emerges out of ritual performances when traditional expressions are reworked and transformed to express dialogue between the past and present (e.g., Babcock, 1986; Berns, 1990; Bruner, 1986; Hodder, 1989; Turner & Bruner, 1986). Contemporary lives are interpreted in light of a relevant past with "cultural change, cultural continuity and cultural transmission" (Bruner, 1986, p. 12) all occurring at the same time in the context of the performed ritual. This paper is a part of a larger investigation focused on the use of dress within ritual to express and partially resolve conflicts dividing the Hmong American community. Conflicts investigated as a part of this research arose out of the Hmong American community members' attempts to reconcile the cultural life of the past with their lives in the United States. These conflicts are visually expressed and debated through the dressed body within the context of Hmong New Year.

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Dress in Hmong Society

Historical evidence supporting the importance of dress within Hmong culture strengthens our contention that dress is used to express and interpret cultural change in the American context. In Laos, Hmong subgroups were marked by corresponding differences in dress styles. Substyles of dress were internally perceived divisions which provided extensive information about the wearer. Peterson (1990) points out the extensive information carried by dress in Lao Hmong communities:

> the individual is recognized as Hmong by other Hmong, who with a glance will know if the stranger they meet shares their dialect, marriage customs, house style, spiritual offerings, standards of beauty in clothing and song, and other cultural facets that distinguish one subgroup from another. They mutually recognize, in a twinkling, what kinds of limits might structure their future relationship. (p. 118)

[1]Dress is defined as "an assemblage of body modifications and supplements displayed by a person in the presentations of self" (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). The supplements include clothing and jewelry. Dress will be used as an all-encompassing term, and clothing where specifically applicable.

Therefore individuals know how to respond socially to one another and what relationships are possible based upon internally understood visual cues carried by dress. The use of substyles of Lao Hmong dress to identify subgroups such as the Striped Hmong, Flowery Hmong, Green Hmong, and others (Cubbs, 1986) underlines the cultural importance of dress as a visible expression of group identity (Lynch, forthcoming).

In addition to the social significance of dress in the daily context, dress also has a history of being used within ritual to express transformation and new life. Hmong elders interviewed as part of this study described Hmong New Year as celebrated in the Lao village context as a three to five day annual holiday celebrating the close of a busy agricultural season (see also Scott, 1982). The New Year was a time of spiritual renewal for the community. It was an opportunity for families and friends to gather together and renew the bonds tying community and family. Clan leaders and shamans performed rituals of renewal that ushered in the New Year, banished the cares of the old year, and made peace with the spirit world in order to safeguard the community for the coming year. Cubbs (1986) testifies to the importance of textiles within the New Year rituals:

> Textiles were a focal point of the all-important rituals held in celebration of the New Year. At the end of harvest time, craft making intensified as costumes and jewelry were prepared for the festivities. New attire not only celebrated the fortunes of the past year but also foreshadowed prosperity of the future. Conversely, the wearing of old clothing portended poverty and misfortune. (p. 21)

The New Year, as a community celebration, brought potential lovers from differing clans together. Female beauty and character was judged not only by biological attributes but by the quality of the handwork worn on the body, so girls and their mothers worked hard to create fine New Year ensembles. A girl was expected to bring into a marriage the ability to sew for the family (Mallinson, Donnelly & Hang, 1988). The fine handwork adorning a young woman's body at the New Year expressed to her male suitors an ability to dress a family in New Year finery and thus create visible expressions of cultural commitment and spiritual renewal.

Conceptual Framework: Ritual and Tradition

Research by Bodnar (1985) on nineteenth century immigrant festivals underscores the relevance of using a conceptual framework stressing the formative role of performed ritual to analyze the meaning of dress worn during ethnic festivals. The immigrant populations studied by Bodnar, like the Hmong, were rural people resettling in a startling and unfamiliar urban industrial world. Bodnar (1985) points out the use of cultural life from the homeland to synthesize the nineteenth century urban immigrants' new American experiences:

> Almost no dimension of the traditional life immigrants knew remained unaffected by the new order which confronted them. At the same time most newcomers did not hesitate to exploit or draw upon past belief and practice if it in some way would facilitate and render intelligible their new life and condition. Even though most newcomers were unskilled toilers, they were in a sense almost all craftsmen in their ability to creatively fashion culture and meaning to suit their daily social and psychological needs. . . . Folk culture was simultaneously transformed and revitalized in urban America, as immigrants sought to enter their own definition of their status and condition. (p. 185)

Bodnar (1985) stresses that the culture of the past was particularly helpful in generating meaning in a "milieu where conflicting agendas and ideologies proliferated" (p. 185). Ethnic festivals modeled upon the past but in revitalized form were celebrated by many nineteenth century immigrant groups. Within the festival format, many of the cultural expressions of the past were transformed to reflect upon their new American immigrant experiences. Turner (1988) argues that ritual is an evolving and responsive means of confronting and temporarily reconciling fundamental cultural conflicts, "Performances of ritual are distinctive phases in the social process, whereby groups and individuals adjust to internal changes and adapt to their external environment" (p. 158). We will demonstrate how Hmong Americans use New Year's dress as an expressive means of coping with conflict between generations resulting from cultural change and as a consciously created link to their Laotian past.

Ethnographic Setting and Data Gathering

The Lao Hmong living in the United States originally migrated out of China in the early 19th century into northern Lao hill country. They began in 1945 to be slowly drawn into regional wars that lasted for 30 years. Their involvement with the United States began in 1961 when they started to assist the American Central Intelligence Agency in a secret war effort. Official Hmong casualty figures were estimated at 18,000 as of 1969 (Dommen, 1971). Following the collapse of the Royal Laotian Government in 1975, loyalist Hmong were forced to flee to Thailand to escape persecution under the hands of the Laotian communists.

The Minnesota State Refugee Office unofficially estimates that in 1991 there were approximately 24,000 Hmong refugees living in the state, with 95% of them living within the St. Paul/Minneapolis metropolitan area. Resettlement in St. Paul and Minneapolis has been affected by the primary and secondary immigration patterns of the Hmong and by the existence of subsidized apartment complexes. There is evidence that Hmong resettlement patterns in the United States are similar to those in Laos (Thao, 1982). Families have been slowly reunited in the United States. As new families migrate, their American relatives often find housing for them in their own apartment complexes or neighborhoods, thus building up homogeneous and bounded

Hmong American enclaves within the larger metropolitan area. Within Minneapolis and St. Paul, Hmong families typically live in concentrated pockets in lower income inner city neighborhoods or within federally subsidized apartment complexes (Chase, 1990). While a small number of Hmong teenagers and children attend private and suburban schools, most are concentrated in inner city public schools, with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs specifically oriented to the Hmong.

We posed our research questions through exploratory investigations focused on informal interactions in the Hmong community, using the fieldwork research guidelines suggested by Becker (1958), Douglas (1976), Ellen (1984), and Fetterman (1989). Fieldwork for this study was conducted between November of 1987 and November of 1990 among the Hmong refugees living in Minneapolis and St. Paul. A variety of fieldwork experiences were employed, gradually moving from informal interactions with Hmong families to more focused strategies for gathering data including detailed fieldnotes, photographic documentation, participant observation, in-depth interviews with teenagers and life histories with elders. The interpretive integrity of this research is strengthened through the use of triangulation (use of multiple sources and methods) across researchers, methods and sites (Burgess, 1984; Denzin 1978a, 1978b). The basic argument for this approach is that drawbacks inherent to each of the methods or sources is counterbalanced when all the data are integrated into a single interpretation. Further, a higher degree of integrity can be assumed if data gathered in several different ways by different researchers confirm the interpretation.

Initial contact by the first author involved the sponsorship of a Hmong family who was from a refugee camp in Thailand. Over time, this contact developed into a personal relationship with an extended Hmong American family. Early contact with the family focused on meeting their resettlement needs. Over time the relationship developed into a friendship. Special family events were shared. This included participation by the first author in traditional celebrations such as naming ceremonies, house cleaning rituals and New Year dinners. On-going informal contact with these families during the three years of fieldwork provided a valuable portrait of the resettlement of an extended Hmong family in the United States (Lynch, 1992). The focus of research on the public celebration of the Hmong New Year began in 1988 and continued in the 1989 and 1990 celebrations.[2] Data gathering included informal interviews, photography of the teenage dress and clothing, and extensive participant observations. Preliminary interpretations of the New Year's data were discussed with a number of Hmong informants, revised, and discussed again with Hmong informants. Following the 1989-1990 New Year's celebration, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with five male and five female competitors for an award given as a part of the New Year festivities.

A second data gathering effort was conducted in the Hmong community as part of a larger project on Southeast Asian refugee families by the second author. More than a year of fieldwork brought the investigator into frequent contact with Hmong elders who were participants in a mutual assistance association. These participant-observation activities provided informal opportunities to discuss family life, resettlement issues, life in Laos and the United States and to gain the trust of informants for a more intensive life history interview process. Life histories were conducted with five men and five women in their homes over a period of several months. The substance of the interviews involved the changes in family life experienced by these men and women as a result of their relocation to the United States (Detzner, 1992). Tapes were translated into English by a Hmong translator and entered into *Ethnograph* (Qualis, 1988) software program for content analysis.

A third data gathering effort involved intensive interviews focused upon the form and meaning of the New Year celebration in prewar Laos, during the war years, and in the United States. A middle-aged Hmong graduate student, who was well-known in the local Hmong community, identified three men and three women who are elderly leaders and interviewed them in their homes for several hours each. He translated and transcribed these interviews to provide historical context for the present study (Vang, 1990).

Findings and Discussion

Generational Bonds and Differences

Few studies have focused on generational linkages and differences in the Hmong refugee community. Our interviews with teenagers and elders revealed substantive differences in how resettlement is experienced by the two generations. Elderly Hmong Americans often expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many said they relied upon younger members of their families as liaisons to the American community outside of the Hmong neighborhood in which they were living. Both of these aspects are captured in this excerpt from an interview with an elderly female in response to a question asking what elders talk about when they get together, "We go and we talk about how we don't know their language, and why we are so dumb so everybody [can] laugh together" (DD-HF1).[3] One elderly woman told the interviewer that she had stopped talking to everyone including her husband, "We are old and dumb so we don't talk" (DD-HF4), an emotional admission that she feels she has no heard voice in her new American community.

Teenagers vividly expressed the difficulties inherent in bridging the gap between Hmong and American culture. These teens, who characterized themselves in English as the "in-between generation," daily experienced the contrast between the world within the Hmong community and the American world at school. The feelings of young Hmong

[2]Primary fieldwork on the New Year celebration was carried out by the first author. However, all three authors attended one or more public celebrations in St. Paul.

[3]Interview data from the three different sets of interviews are coded according to interviewer's initials and subject number throughout this paper. For a complete listing of interviews conducted as a part of this research project see Lynch (1992).

Americans were poignantly captured by a teenage speaker at a parent child banquet held at a local high school. He told the audience that many Hmong American teenagers were ashamed of their parents because they were Hmong and were not successful on American terms and that this shame affected their own self image as well as the strength of the community. Speaking as a fellow young Hmong American, he urged the teenagers to take pride in their cultural background. But as he continued, he directed his comments to the parents, "We are different than you. When you parents tell us we are not Hmong you are right. We are not Hmong. We are not American. We are Hmong American."

The division between Hmong American elders and youth is intensified by the fact that most Hmong Americans in St. Paul and Minneapolis live in homogeneous neighborhoods. Many adult Hmong, particularly the elderly, live almost exclusively within the Hmong community. In marked contrast, teenagers attend public schools and are in daily contact with larger American society. In its more positive guise, this split between the old and young results in mutual respect and assistance. More typically, the demands of relocation and adaptation have fragmented Hmong families into three distinct generations, each having their own milieu and adjustment problems. Teenagers are swept into a demanding daily routine dominated by school; elders remain at home talking among themselves and caring for the younger children in the family; the generation of those in their middle age serves as a liaison between the outside world and the community and often financially supports the other two generations.

Generational differences in leadership roles have been consistently noted in Hmong refugee and resettlement literature. Beginning with Smalley's (1986) work in the refugee camps of Thailand, dual leadership patterns have been found where elders retain ultimate authority within the community, but youth are charged with leadership roles involving contact with outside agencies and individuals. Smalley argues that the roots of this duality can be traced to the breakdown of preexisting, clan-based social structures as a result of the war and relocation in the refugee camps. Hmong families were forced to break into small groups in order to avoid detection as they fled Laos. When they reached refugee camps, they were not settled according to clan but rather by arrival dates, thus creating a fragmented settlement in which traditional family-based leadership was difficult.

Generational differences in leadership roles which developed in the Hmong refugee camps are also evident from research conducted in Hmong communities in the United States. Both Finck (1982) and Olney (1988) stress generational differences in leadership roles in their research. Finck (1982) writes of the differences between the power held by the elders and the power held by younger members of the Hmong American community in Rhode Island:

> Clan leadership pivots on age. . . . When the elders speak, the community responds. The older clan leaders—who have the political power to mobilize their community—rely on the younger bilingual men for a path through the American woods. The younger men have ideas but not the community respect which only their elders may confer. (p. 25)

The sources of power behind the older and younger generations of Hmong leaders have rarely been examined in the research on Hmong Americans. Older leaders have access to information about Hmong culture that the younger generation believes is important to learn in order to maintain their Hmong identity. On the other hand, the younger generation has more completely absorbed an intuitive understanding of American culture, an understanding necessary to build a new life in the United States. Many middle-generation Hmong Americans were uprooted by their family's early involvement in the war and moved into Lao cities. As a result, many have limited memories of village life. For example, a middle generation female community leader working on the 1989 public New Year in St. Paul commented that she was the daughter of a military leader and grew up "more Lao than Hmong." She said that she first learned about Hmong village dress when she began working on the St. Paul New Year celebration. Consequently the middle generation, like their younger counterparts, are often dependent upon the older generation for information about their own culture. Middle generation Hmong may be conversant in how to survive in the United States, but they do not have the depth of understanding of the younger generation, an understanding coveted within the Hmong American community.

In the interviews conducted for this study, there were repeated references to problems related to the fact that elders depend heavily on youth for information on American life and customs. Older Hmong said they felt trapped by their inability to survive on an everyday basis without the help of their younger relatives. Simple tasks like driving or taking the bus are made difficult primarily because the older Hmong do not know how to speak or read English. For example one elder Hmong female said, "It makes you very sad that you are dumb and you don't know their language. . . . If you go to school and you can drive and you can speak their language, life will not be hard for you like today" (DD-HF1). Perhaps more significantly, one Hmong man expressed his concern about the fact that he was unable to help his children learn what they needed to know to lead successful lives in the United States. When asked what important problems he had in the United States he answered, "I don't have no one that help me to give better advice to teach or show my children. No one show my children to do this or do that, because I'm not educated and don't have a good idea to educate my children" (DD-HM2).

Elder Hmong consistently turn responsibility for future leadership over to the young people being educated in American schools. Teenagers repeatedly expressed their frustration with the feeling that they did not know enough about their own culture to participate fully in Hmong community life. One girl said that she did not play the traditional ball toss game during the New Year celebration because people who play "know a lot of things . . . as for me and my friends we grew up into Americans. We are more Americanized than Hmong" (AL-F04). Many teenagers expressed respect for peers who know how to sing the poetry traditionally chanted as a part of a New Year ball game, but few Hmong American teenagers still practice the art form. Large Hmong American crowds surrounded singers at the New Year in both 1989 and 1990 indicating the once common art

is now a rare occurrence, drawing not only the attention of interested outsiders, but of insiders as well.

Throughout the teenage interviews, elder males are consistently referred to as knowledgeable about Hmong culture and therefore worthy of respect and capable of playing key leadership roles within the Hmong community. The differing attitudes of the young toward middle and elder generation leaders were aptly captured in an interview with a teenage boy. When asked if clan leaders were always the oldest male in the family, the boy replied, "No, not necessarily the oldest clan leader—just the clan leader that can lead the family. For example he knows how to speak English, he knows how to write, he has high education" (AL-M03). When this question was followed by another asking if younger leaders could also lead the rituals during the New Year the boy said, "Oh, no. The only one who actually does the ceremony is old people. Old people that have certain words to say. Those young people mostly do not know how to say" (AF-M03). As Finck (1982) and Olney (1988) found in their research, the role of the cultural liaison is assigned to the younger generation leaders; however, much of the real power remains vested in the elders because of the knowledge they have accumulated over time.

Hmong American New Year

Important cultural knowledge is shared and transferred between generations in the performance of two versions of the traditional New Year celebration. This successful transfer of knowledge within ritual is in contrast with daily life, which tends to underscore the growing chasm between older and younger Hmong Americans. One New Year's celebration is a private family celebration led by an elder male member of the family. The second version is a large scale public celebration organized by middle generation Hmong and focused primarily on Hmong teenagers. In both performances dress is used as a generational link.

The contemporary New Year celebrations stem from the Hmong cultural past. Scott (1987) underscores the importance of the concept of renewal in his description of the meaning of the New Year drawn from the ethnographic accounts of Geddes (1976) and Bernatzik (1970):

> Of the various farming-related ceremonies in the Hmong annual Lunar cycle, the New Year Celebration (*naj peb caug*) was the most elaborate and important . . . At this time all work would cease, the lineage members who had established satellite farming camps would return to the main village to begin preparations for the celebration. Standing as a spiritual and material marker between the old year and the new, the ceremony was aimed in general at removing the evil influences that had accumulated during the previous year and ensuring an adequate supply of good fortune for the next. All the specific rituals performed during the celebration involved expiation, supplication, and sacrifice intended to reassemble the ancestral souls and familiar spirits back at the village and to secure their spiritual assistance for the coming year. (p. 37)

The idea that the New Year is a time for renewal is emphasized by the building of passageways by extended families through which all members pass from the old into the new year. This passageway was one of several Lao Hmong New Year rituals depicted in an embroidered cloth used during interviews by the first author. The embroidered narrative cloths are called story cloths and are a relatively new Hmong textile art which developed in the refugee camps in Thailand (Bessec, 1988). Interviews conducted using the story cloth revealed some differences among different clans' performances. As depicted on the cloth (see Figure 1), some but not all clans symbolically marked the passage from the old to the new year by hanging donut-shaped bundles made of pieces of the past year's clothing from a rope stretched between two trees. As the family members walked through the passage between the trees, cares and troubles of the past year were symbolically left behind in the bundles of clothing suspended above their heads.

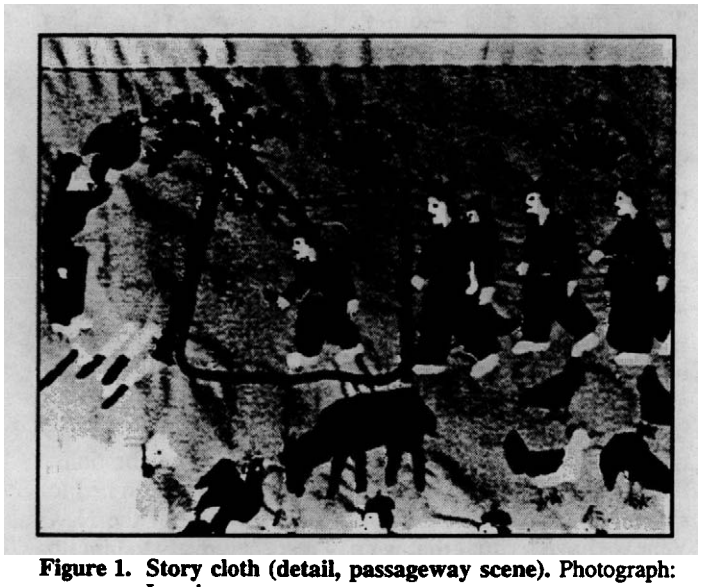

Figure 1. Story cloth (detail, passageway scene). Photograph: Lynch.

An interviewed male elder described the passageway ritual as the central feature of the New Year as celebrated in Laos. He said that the ritual was important because "it means you send all the bad things away that can take you to evil, and you get some good things to come back to your heart" (Vang, 1990, BV-M03). A Hmong American teenager described the making and meaning of the bundles in this way, "Every person's clothes in the clan—we tear a little bit from him and a little bit of clothing from everyone and we tie it together. And it means all those bad things should stay here and not with those people" (AL-M03). The bundles, like the New Year celebration more generally, underscored the fundamental value placed upon family re-

lationships. While representative pieces of clothing from individuals are collected, they are then bound into a bundle representing the family. The celebration was both a family and community event in much the same sense that Christian holidays celebrated in the United States have both private and public dimensions.

Private Celebrations

In the Hmong American community studied, the New Year is also celebrated both privately within family homes and publicly in a large civic center. Most of the interviewed teenagers participated in some version of the New Year rituals within their homes. Descriptions of the privately performed rituals ranged from fairly simple celebrations focused on sharing a meal to larger, more complex celebrations led by an elder male member of the family. The most elaborate home celebrations included the building of a modified version of the passageway described above and the making of cloth bundles from pieces of dress worn over the past year.

Teenagers were careful to point out that the dress used to make the bundles in the United States is American style, not Hmong style, dress. When asked why, one teenager replied that the clothing collected and tied together must be clothing worn regularly during the past year. "It must be a T shirt or something—something I have worn a lot that has the good and bad in it" (AL-M05). In other words it must be cloth that has absorbed the experiences of the wearer during the past year. A second male adolescent stated it this way, "They [must be] old clothes that have stayed with your body a long time" (AL-M03). Pieces of American style dress thus carry the contemporary experiences of Hmong American youth into a ritual rooted in the past that is led and best understood by Hmong elders. The elders, as the ritual leaders and creators of the cloth bundles, actively translate American life and clothing into the Hmong idiom. They help the Hmong American community make sense of the present by using cloth as a bridge between life as it was lived in Laos and life as it is now experienced in the United States.

The value the community places upon elders as the ritual leaders is recognized during the private celebrations. Some teenagers described very formal efforts designed to show respect to the elders, "During the time of the New Year we have a ritual that we pay respect directly to him [to the oldest male member of the family]. All the people that are younger than him, we go to his place and we pay respect to him by kneeling down and he gives us a New Year blessing" (AL-M05). More typically the teenager's descriptions revealed underlying conflicts between the older and younger generations that were either struggled with or temporarily resolved within the home-based ritual. Some teenagers commented that many of their peers no longer formally or informally honored the elders as a part of the New Year celebration. Some teenagers admitted that they rarely attend the private family New Year rituals. Instead they used the opportunity to socialize with teenage relatives gathered in one household for the holiday.

The private celebration is also an arena within which individuals and families attempt to come to terms with conflicts between their commitments to their traditional animist religious beliefs and Christianity. While conversion to Christianity has been taking place among Lao Hmong for many decades (Tapp, 1989), many Hmong Americans associate the old religious practices with their past and associate conversion to Christianity with loss of tradition. One estimate is that about half of the Hmong refugees in the United States have converted, at least partially, to the Christian faith (Dunnigan, 1982).

Some Christian teenagers and their families clearly feel that participating in the traditional rituals is in conflict with their current religious beliefs. Some Christian teenagers said their families no longer perform the rituals. In other cases, the rituals are performed but many Christian members of the family do not participate. For example, when asked about the building of the passageway from the old to the new year one female teenager responded:

> We are Christians now, so my parents, they don't do that now. At New Year we just celebrate by having a big dinner.... Well, my uncle they do it [build a passageway] and we do go to it but it is just that we don't go under the thing. It is this thing that they put blessing things on. We just don't go under it, but we go attend it. It is family you know. (AL-F03)

This teenager takes care to distance herself from the religious aspects of the ceremony but concludes by affirming the value of the ceremony as it serves to underscore the value of family relationships. One male teenager directly correlated the loss of Hmong culture to the conversion of many Hmong Americans to Christianity, "It [Christianity] is destroying a lot of the culture today...because they don't know much about what becoming a Christian really is and they are converted just like that and they turn everything over" (AL-M05).

The conflict captured by the above responses again underscores the problem solving aspect of the New Year as privately celebrated in the United States. Preceding the ritual and within the ritual itself, individuals and families assess their commitment to aspects of American and Hmong cultural life and during the performance itself, the balance is expressed. The integration of American material culture into the cloth bundle, in the form of American style dress, expresses the balance the community is working toward. This balance recognizes the value of the past as remembered by the elders and the contributions of the younger generation to the future of the Hmong in America. However, the nature of this balance is precarious as evidenced by the teenager's comments.

Public New Year

The public performance of Hmong New Year in St. Paul, like comparable 19th century ethnic celebrations discussed by Bodnar (1985), draws on long-standing practices, but adapts to its new American context. Although Hmong of all ages attend, the celebration is focused primarily on youth. The New Year brings together old and new aspects of Hmong life in a juxtaposition of ancient ritual and American popular culture. The auditorium floor is dominated by young people engaged in a ball toss courtship ritual by day and a rock and roll dance by night. Middle-

aged and elderly Hmong Americans watch from the balcony and the sidelines on the main floor. The stage features spectacles ranging from shamanistic rituals performed by elders to heavy metal rock and roll performed by punk Hmong teenagers.

The stage shows generally begin in mid-morning with dramatic reproductions of the New Year rituals as privately practiced in Laos. When queried from the audience, teenagers tend to say that they are performed so that the young people will know what it was like in Laos. Most people in the audience appear to watch rather than participate in the rituals, although small crowds gather in front of the stage as the rituals are performed. The largest show of participation observed was in 1990 when a large scale passageway was constructed as part of the opening ceremony. A majority of people on the main floor of the civic center joined in the ceremony and walked through the ritual passageway from the old to the new year. Similar to the stage performances at nineteenth century ethnic festivals studied by Bodnar (1985), these rituals are pointedly dramatic and didactic in intent (see also Scott, 1987, p. 29).

The conflicts inherent in the position of Hmong American teenagers as the generation caught between both Hmong and American culture were acted out in many ways. Plays about the theme were performed and speeches delivered by Hmong teenage leaders often centered on problems related to being both Hmong and American. For example one young woman summarized her speech by saying "It was about liberation. I talked about the right of being a daughter, because usually being a daughter a lot of people put you down because you are a girl" (AL-F04). She then went on to say that the speech was criticized by male elders because they felt that "Just because she comes to the United States, she [the girl making the speech] thinks she has more knowledge" (AL-F04). In 1989 the very structure of the celebration moved from an opening day focused on the Hmong past, to a closing day focused on the Hmong future in America. All three public celebrations underscored the role of teenagers as cultural go-betweens.

While everyday dress figures prominently in the symbolic repertoire of some versions of the home celebration of New Year, dress styles derived from Lao Hmong prototypes are generally only worn to the public celebration of New Year and are most consistently worn by Hmong youth. Middle generation and older Hmong Americans generally sit in the balcony area or stand on the sidelines of the mainfloor as spectators. The teenagers are the most active participants and dress for the various roles they play throughout the day. Hmong teenagers use dress to mark movement from one cultural world into another. An interviewed Hmong teenager said, "at the New Year if we do something Hmong we wear Hmong clothes, and if we do something American we wear American clothes" (AL-F03), indicating a conscious association of dress with cultural identity and/or situation. The teenagers generally wear Hmong style dress for stage events that express pride in their Hmong heritage, such as singing a traditional song. They also tend to wear Hmong style dress when they participate in the courtship ball toss game. American style dress is worn for the evening dances and for stage events focused upon their lives in the United States. Dress worn in the evening is typically purchased rather than sewn at home and is often worn for other formal events throughout the year.

Teenagers are proud of the traditional dress they wear to the New Year. The following quote from an interview with a male teenager expresses the role he feels dress plays in the celebration of the New Year:

> If I go to the New Year wearing American clothes I wouldn't feel proud that I was actually celebrating the New Year. I have personal opinions about how I see people at the New Year. If I see people wearing American clothes it is sort of saying that they are not really celebrating the New Year. They are not valuing it anymore. (AL-M05)

There is a direct link in the mind of the speaker between expression of ethnic pride and the wearing of traditional dress to the New Year. Further, by saying that "people wearing American clothes . . . are not really celebrating the New Year," he indicates that full participation in the New Year as a ritual celebration is dependent upon wearing Hmong New Year apparel.

Dress at the public celebration of New Year also expresses the intermix of the two cultures. In the private celebration, everyday American style dress is moved into the Hmong world through ritual transformation by inclusion in the cloth bundle. In the public context, Hmong style dress is aesthetically transformed through cultural authentication (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981) to reflect American as well as Hmong culture. Cultural authentication is a four step process by which a borrowed cultural element becomes integrated and meaningful to the host culture. Teenagers and the older Hmong women that sew the garments draw inspiration from the range of cloth and trims available in American fabric stores to create ensembles that, while rooted in Lao Hmong prototypes, are a creative blend of both Hmong and American material culture influences. Figure 2 features typical examples of what Lynch (1992) classified as new style traditional New Year ensembles. New style traditional female ensembles are characterized by an openness to American influences in terms of additive trims and the wearing of the new style hat. While the basic components of Lao Hmong dress are present—the intricately pleated skirt, the apron, the layers of waist ties and bags, and cuffed shirt—American material culture in the form of additive trims is used to heavily encrust surfaces and borders. Figure 3 is a detail of a new style hat illustrating the integration of American lace, bangles and sequins into the older style handwork.

While most Hmong style dress is sewn for and worn by youth, it is generally designed by older women in the community. In St. Paul, well known older women were given credit for starting the new fashions. It is therefore experienced older sewers who are largely responsible for the final stage of the cultural authentication process, transforming the borrowed elements into the Hmong aesthetic. The ready willingness on the part of older artists to experiment with new fabrics and trims indicates that the desire for the new is not purely an American phenomena as these women learned to sew and judge the quality of handwork in

Figure 2. New style traditional ensemble. Photograph: Lynch.

villages in Laos. In fact, the aesthetic preference for *new* versions of the old styles is fundamentally based on the very structure of New Year rituals of renewal. Old clothing is woven into bundles representing the past year and new clothing sewn expressly for the new year is worn through the passageway marking new life and emerging possibility. What is *new* is shiny, bright, full of contrast and color. What is *old* is dull and faded with little contrast and subdued color. In the past, hand woven hemp was polished to a shine to express the Hmong value placed upon the appearance of *newness* (Cubbs, 1986). Thus, the ability to provide new clothes for the family is a mark of economic prosperity and well being. Women able to sew for their families help assure the spiritual well being of the family for the coming year and visibly display the ability of the family to meet the material and spiritual needs of its members.

The older members of the community are responsible for the creative mixing of Hmong and American materials and aesthetic influences which characterize dress worn by teenagers to Hmong American New Year. It is an act initiated and performed by elders that encourages and celebrates the integration of American influences into the traditions of the past. Thus dress again moves the Hmong American community back and forth between Hmong and American culture, the old and the new, the lives of the secluded elders and the active "Americanized" lives of the teenagers. The often perceived separate lives of the old

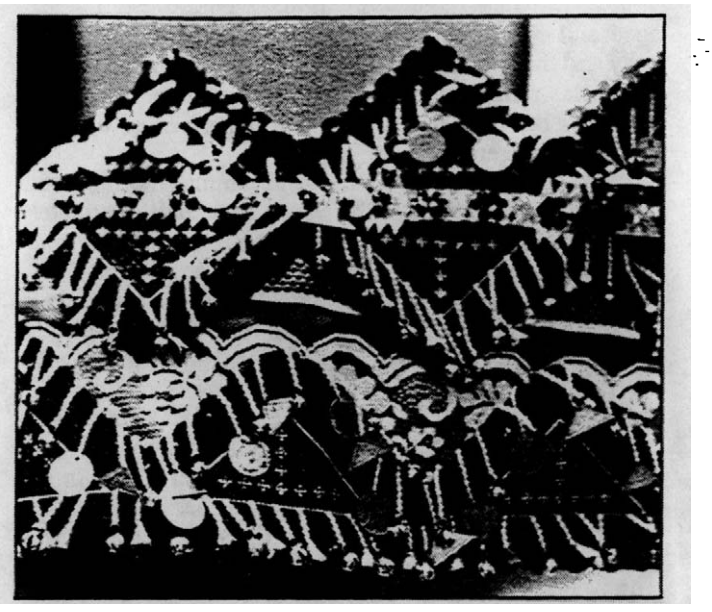

Figure 3. New style New Year hat (detail). Photograph: Lynch.

and the young are temporarily merged in a triumphant and vivid show of Hmong American pride and strength as Hmong teenagers display the dress of the past in newly vitalized form.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Like nineteenth century immigrants, Hmong Americans have created an ethnic celebration within which problems dividing the community are expressed and debated. Within the context of the New Year, problems related to generational conflict are both directly and indirectly addressed. Within the private celebrations, families struggle to give voice to the contributions of each generation and thus to link their lives in the United States to their past lives and the lives of their ancestors. In this arena, American style dress is used to integrate the Americanized lives of the young into the rituals based in the past and best understood and appreciated by the elders. In the public performance, the entire community uses dress styles of the past to creatively fashion a visual display of the integration of Hmong and American culture. Teenagers as active participants and wearers of the new style Hmong and American dress are recognized for their role as the generation representing aspects of both Hmong and American culture. Elders, who are primarily responsible for the design and sewing, are recognized for their ability to transform and make sense of the future in light of the past through designs integrating aspects of both Hmong and American culture. Hmong American New Year's dress is thus a rich medium used by both wearers and designers to express a myriad of feelings related to attempting to balance the desire to remain tethered to the past with the equally strong desire to be in step with contemporary reality.

Perhaps most significantly, dress gives voice to the varying experiences of both young and old Hmong American immigrants. Through visual display, experiences are validated and celebrated. To be human, according to the following quotation from an elderly Hmong woman is to have a voice:

> If you have money, then it seems that your voice is loud and its seems that you are a bit stronger. To be a human, I tell the truth. It's the same in Laos and it is the same here if you have money to spend to the point where you are not worried about spending and you have chickens and pigs and when you have visitors you can just pick up and use. It seems that your voice is loud and it's like an animal that is very fat. We come to live in this country it is the same. If you don't have money . . . you become like a caterpillar, you are very thin. . . . Then your voice sounds like you can no longer breathe. Hmong it is like that, in a Hmong life, if you have money, if you have enough vegetables and rice to eat, you have enough livestock to eat and you can't eat it all or drink it all and you don't envy anybody, then wherever you go your voice is very loud and you are very strong. (DD-HF1)

The Hmong American community is composed of many voices. There is no one definition of what it means to be Hmong in America. A young man experiences it differently than his sister, than his grandmother, than his father. Dress is an expressive means of communicating the varying experiences of immigrant Hmong Americans as they struggle to create a new version of civilized life in the United States. Within the context of ritual, as argued by Turner, the conflicts related to cultural change are expressed and debated, and through dress some degree of resolution is attained. Our research illustrates the value of using Turner's work on tradition and ritual to analyze the meaning of dress worn by cultural groups under stress because of relocation. In particular, the meaning of dress worn during American ethnic festivals lends itself to such an analysis.

More generally, as research in the textile and apparel area moves toward the study of cultural boundaries as areas of exchange and synthesis (Baizerman, 1987), it becomes imperative to work with theoretical frameworks which stress the flexibility of cultural life. Therefore we must move toward a study of the use of material culture to negotiate change rather than express structural stability. Victor Turner's concept of ritual as an arena in which culture is formulated is a rich theoretical framework for exploring the meaning of the dressed and re-dressed body in the context of our modern culturally diverse world.

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